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CIA Denies Contra Atrocities

Allegations of Rights Abuses Challenged

By Robert Parry
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A newly declassified CIA report, trying to discredit charges of Nicaraguan rebel atrocities, denies that the contras often slit the throats of captives, contending that the rebels "are normally not equipped with either bayonets or combat knives."

The 12-page report, obtained last week by The Associated Press, was drafted as a response to a detailed report accusing the contra rebels of human rights abuses in 28 cases. The CIA document was based on seven hours of interviews with field

officers of the CIA-organized Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN).

The claim that FDN troops were not equipped with knives was challenged by two former rebel leaders who said in interviews that combat knives and bayonets were common among the troops and were frequently used to execute prisoners.

"It was one of the things that upset me most about the FDN," said Edgar Chamorro, who was an FDN director until he was fired a year ago for publicly criticizing the movement.

Salvador Icaza, a former FDN officer now living in the United States, said that "having a knife in

the jungle is a matter of survival" and that a majority of FDN troops carried one. Icaza also said slitting throats was a favorite method of killing prisoners.

One State Department official, who insisted on anonymity, called the CIA report "the best thing" done by the U.S. government on alleged contra atrocities and said it supported the administration's view that many of the charges are disinformation planted by Nicaragua's leftist government.

But Rep. Samuel Gejdenson (D-Conn.), a House Foreign Affairs Committee member who has pressed for an investigation of the human rights charges, called the report "incredibly sloppy at best and intentionally deceptive at worst."

While acknowledging some contra abuses, the CIA document challenges many charges contained in a report by New York lawyer Reed Brody, who compiled 145 affidavits from Nicaraguans and Americans who said they witnessed or were victims of human rights abuses by contras in 28 separate incidents. Although the CIA document is not dated, administration officials said it was prepared last spring.

"Throughout the [Brody] report, defended localities are portrayed as innocent villages and FDN attacks are depicted as attacks on innocent civilians," the CIA document said in arguing that many of the "civilians" were actually combatants.

"The frequent claims of kidnaping that run throughout the report constitute the best example of misuse of words," it asserted. "There is nobody in the FDN who is there against his/her will—it is an entirely voluntary organization."